



Fact Sheet

Managing waste of pets, wildlife

August 2016

Pet waste and water contamination

Droppings from pets, such as dogs, cats, birds and rabbits, can threaten human health when they wash into rivers, streams and other water bodies that are sources of our drinking water. If ingested, organisms found in animal waste can cause diarrhea and abdominal pain and, in some cases, even death.

While water treatment plants are effective in removing or neutralizing contaminants in drinking water, some organisms, such as *Cryptosporidium*, are highly resistant to disinfection with chlorine. This protozoan causes gastrointestinal illness lasting two to ten days in healthy individuals, but it can be fatal in people with weakened immune systems.

Dog and cat droppings also often contain roundworms and other parasites. Infection by just a few roundworms usually causes no problems, but more severe infections may cause fevers, bronchitis, asthma or vision problems. Cat feces may also contain the parasite called toxoplasmosis, a serious health concern for pregnant women and persons with compromised immune systems.

Prevention measures

The most effective way for pet owners to limit their pet's contribution to source water contamination is to simply clean up and dispose of the pet waste. They may be flushed down a toilet to travel to a community sewage plant or septic system for proper treatment. Also, pet waste may be buried or sealed in a plastic bag and put into the garbage if local law so allows.

Bury pet wastes properly

To bury pet wastes, dig a hole at least one foot

deep and place three to four inches of pet waste at the bottom. Use a shovel to chop and mix the wastes into the soil at the bottom, then cover the wastes with at least eight inches of soil to keep rodents and pets from digging them up. Pet wastes should only be buried around ornamental plants and never in vegetable gardens or food-growing locations.

Keep pet waste out of compost piles

Pet wastes are **NOT** recommended for backyard compost piles. While animal manures can make useful fertilizer, parasites carried in dog and cat feces can cause diseases in humans and should not be incorporated into compost piles. Dogs and cats should be kept away from vegetable gardens as well.

Managing wildlife waste

Reducing the attractiveness of yards to wildlife can discourage non-domestic animals from settling in your yard. Fencing, mowing, landscaping changes, tree pruning (to reduce bird roosting) or drainage devices can divert species from sensitive areas. Food sources can be kept to a minimum by prohibiting feeding by the public, removing trash, securing pet feed and reducing palatable plant species.

Harassment programs can be implemented to repel birds and wildlife from valuable surface waters. Available methods include habitat modification, decoys, eagle kites, noisemakers and scarecrows or plastic owls. Be sure to consult fish and wildlife agencies regarding the handling of protected species such as Canadian geese, which are protected by federal law. Harming these birds or their eggs can result in stiff penalties.